S. G. DEUSKAR LECTURES ON
INDIAN HISTORY, 1981

Tapan Raychaudhuri

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Published for
Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
by
K P Bagchi & Company
CALCUTTA ● NEW DELHI

K P BAGCHI & COMPANY
286, B. B. Ganguli Street, Calcutta-700 012
I - 1698 Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi-110 019

First Published : 1987

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S.C.E.R.T., West Bengal
Date 27.2.91
Acc. No. 4900

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ISBN : 81-7074-020-7

Printed by Prabartak Printing & Halftone Limited, 52/3 B. B. Ganguli Street, Calcutta 700 012 and published by Susanta Ghosh, Registrar, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 10 Lake Terrace, Calcutta-700 029.

Three Views of Europe from Nineteenth Century Bengal

I

The Bengali intelligentsia in the nineteenth century developed very early an awareness of a wider world. Raja Rammohan watched with anxious empathy the course of liberal movements and struggles for freedom in Europe and Latin America. He also learnt Greek and Hebrew to explore the sources of Christianity. At a later date, we learn from Keshab Sen's *Sulabh Samachar,* the students of a school contributed eight annas to relieve the sufferings of Parisians after their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The Sadler Commission noted with interest, in 1917, the Bengali college students' avid curiosity about intellectual trends in London, Paris and New York. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* confirms in impressive detail the truth of Sadler's observation. The interest in Western life and thought, both the liberal and the Marxist versions, remains a feature of Bengali intellectual life till today. I shall venture an opinion based on inadequate and impressionistic evidence : the depth and extent of this interest in other cultures, unrelated to professional concerns or career objectives, are probably not duplicated in any other part of the sub-continent. I base my conclusions, *inter alia,* on the record crowds at the Calcutta book fairs and the brisk sale of books of which only one segment is directly linked to Indian life. The 'effective demand' thus expressed is based on average incomes which would have discouraged such exuberance anywhere else in the world.

The above observation, one hopes, will not be taken as the

expression of chauvinistic vanity by an expatriate Bengali. It has a relevance to the theme of these lectures. Incidentally, the text of the present pamphlet suggests that the interest in Western life and thought in nineteenth century Bengal was not exclusively an expression of a healthy intellectual life. The same conclusion may not be irrelevant to the late twentieth century concern with Euro-American civilization. A theme relevant to but not covered by the present exercise is the continual reference to Western models as norms, to be accepted or rejected, in nineteenth century Bengal. This concern was a powerful influence on social attitudes and behaviour,—and often a very unhealthy one.

The interest in Western civilization was the end result of two mutually overlapping historical experiences—colonial rule and contact with a totally different culture. The inevitably negative associations of alien rule, the unacceptable face of imperialism, generated a two-fold reaction. The resentment against denial of access to opportunities and power above a clearly demarcated level was sharpened by perceptions of racial discrimination in the administration of justice and the Anglo-Indian's uninhibited declaration of racial superiority. The educated Bengali also had to cope with the Christian missionary criticism of cherished institutions and values. The psychological need for cultural self-assertion induced inevitably a quest for the limitations of European culture—of evidence to prove that 'they' were no better than 'us'. The simple dichotomy—first projected by the ruling race precluding alternative possibilities of aggregation on the basis of material interest, professions or loyalties to value systems which might cut across the racial barrier—was accepted in its mirror image by the ruled. But even the negative associations of imperial rule fostered curiosity about the history and culture of the ruling race. Vivekananda described Westerners as the mighty descendants of Virochana, the demon who concluded that the *atman* was nothing but the body. The Bengali intelligentsia was anxious to understand the secret of their power over less fortunate humans.

Imperial rule, one must remember, also had a very positive image in the consciousness of the colonial elite. The latter, as collaborators, were initially contented admirers of the system which had generated their new means of livelihood and, up to a

point, fulfilled their aspirations. Even when their contentment was no longer unqualified, the admiration persisted alongside the sense of chagrin that had never been entirely absent. Besides, the Bengali Hindu castes with traditions of literary education discovered in the Western humanities and sciences an unfamiliar and exciting experience. The excitement centred on an ideal world of great books, heroic achievements and high purpose seldom replicated in the lives of Westerners they encountered. Most mortals would have found it somewhat difficult to live up to that image of grand civilization. A well-known fact needs to be emphasized in this context. The Bengali Hindu excitement over the West was selective and often unpredictably eccentric. It cannot be explained with reference to any simple rubric of a colonial elite's responses to the dominant culture. If we are to believe Bankim, every college student in Bengal knew by heart the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. To the best of one's knowledge, the nineteenth century apotheosis of Shakespeare was a uniquely Bengali phenomenon outside the European world. At a later date, Vivekananda and his fellow sanyasis used to chant *Vive la republique* like a *mantram* while listening to a reading of Carlyle. The scene, arguably, could not have occurred in the Theravadin monasteries of Ceylon, the *gurudwaras* in the Land of Five Rivers, or the *gurukulas* of the Aryasamajists in the nineteenth century. If the institutions of higher Western learning in Bengal were intended to produce functionaries for the colonial regime, they were indeed turning out somewhat unsuitable products. *Les philosophes* and the French Revolution, so attractive to the Bengali undergraduates, were hardly the ideal diet for future clerks at the Writers Building or for Deputy Magistrates holding sway in the *muffassil*. Besides, the curriculum does not explain the cultural preferences illustrated by the examples cited. Why an entire generation of educated Bengalis, instructed by Bankim, considered the Waverly Novels the height of literary achievement remains an unexplained puzzle in the history of contacts between dissimilar cultures. In short, perhaps the most interesting features of the Bengali concern with western civilization are those which have no causal links with the fact of colonialism and are traceable instead to an uncharted area of the group mind—the

selective and eccentric curiosity about other societies. The fact of alien rule, especially the negative responses it provoked, drove that curiosity at times into unhealthy channels. There is little joy in contemplating the unacceptable ways of other people. In general, the Bengali interest in Europe's life and culture was not a joyless pursuit.

II

One purpose of the present lectures is to underline the variety which was a hallmark of Bengali perceptions of the West. The three thinkers discussed in these lectures can all be located within a narrow spectrum of social and intellectural experience in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They were all high caste Hindus educated in the institutions of higher Western learning in or near Calcutta. They were born and brought up either in the metropolis itself or within a twenty-five miles radius of the city. Two of them were successful members of the colonial bureaucracy. The third just missed being a barrister practising in the Calcutta High Court. Their cultural and intellectual sympathies were with burgeoning nationalist consciousness informed powerfully by an emphasis on the Hindu identity. Their concern with and assessment of Western civilization frequently, but not always, centred around the same questions. Yet they came up with very different answers. The difference illustrates the alternative possibilities inherent in encounters between different cultures, even under the inhibiting circumstances of political domination.

The life experience of the colonial elite was shaped by two interlinked yet distinct sets of influences—the structured features of the colonial nexus and Indian social organization on the one hand and the unstructured, amorphous milieu of social-cultural life on the other. The former implied some clearly defined limits and a measure of predictability. The latter opened up possibilities which were less finite and determinate. For instance, the career opportunities open to an educated Bengali were determined in the main by the structure and policies of the British Indian government. So were the hierarchy and order of command within the bureaucracy which set the pattern

of relationship between Indian officials and their British superiors. Formal education dispensed through schools and colleges, the method of teaching and the curricula, provided the structured element in the intellectual influences on the life of the intelligentsia. Within the indigenous society, caste and *bhadralok* status (not a category open to the less fortunate or one from which a person could easily fall) were similarly well-defined elements, which limited the range of alternative possibilities. Limited possibilities did not, of course, imply a grey uniformity of experience. The educated Bengali did have a choice of livelihoods—in the bureaucracy, clerical services, professions, or as rentiers and, to a limited extent, even as modern entrepreneurs and every category covered a range of possibilities. Again, the system of education offered a choice of courses. And, of course, the bhadralok could be rich or poor and belong to one or other of the many 'sub-castes'.

Even the structured features of their lives contained for the Bengali intelligentsia amorphous and indeterminate areas of experience. The Bengali students at the institutions of higher learning reacted very differently to the academic fare on offer. Michael Madhusudan detested mathematics and was fascinated by the classical languages of Europe. Bhudev felt equally attracted by the sciences and the humanities. Bankim was bored stiff by the curricular education and read voraciously according to his own intellectual appetites. Again, as a bureaucrat, the novelist considered his means of livelihood the worst curse of his life. Bhudev was content to pursue the career opportunities open to him with Brahminical single-mindedness. The hierarchy and order of command despite their unstated alignment along racial lines permitted up to a point a happy career experience in the latter's case, but not for the highly sensitive novelist.

The unstructured milieu necessarily allowed a far wider range of variations. Young Bengal's culinary preference for beef and addiction to alcohol had no necessary causal links with colonial rule or any of the institutions it had created. Their habits produced an ambience which might prove to be exciting or repulsive depending on one's personality and social conditioning. The books through which the West was primarily

encountered offered infinite choice. Even when people read the same books, their preferences, perceptions and responses covered a wide range. There were, no doubt, identifiable trends which subsumed the variety of individuals reactions, but the differing nuances of meaning which different individuals perceived in Western culture were an important feature of nineteenth century intellectural history. To give one more example of the manner in which the milieu implied possibilities of variation, the experience of family life was often too elusive to permit of any classification. It could influence powerfully one's view of the world and perception of other cultures.

The perceptions of the West discussed in these lectures—and, more generally, in nineteenth century Bengal—reflect certain trends in the life of the times as well as the very distinctive personalities and life-experiences of the three protagonists. Particular elements of those perceptions cannot be traced to one source or the other without committing the fallacy of reductionism. The individuals discussed in these lectures were very distinctive personalities. They interacted with the dominant historical trends of the period in very different ways. The individuality of their perceptions reflects the rich texture of nineteenth century Bengali culture. Their life experiences help explain the differences in their outlook and concern. These are also likely to be of interest to anyone who considers history a humanistic discipline which can, like literature, explore alternative possibilities of existence.

A clearly articulated nationalist ideology was very much a part of elite consciousness in Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The memoirs of Rajnarayan Basu and his junior contemporary, Sibnath Sastri, bear witness to the intensity of patriotic sentiments and impatience with the fact of foreign rule. 'National' Nabagopal's numerous efforts, appropriating freely the adjective an admiring public had attached to his name, were directed towards programmes of self-help and national regeneration. Many others, like Rabindranath's brother, Jyotirindranath, were anxious to devise similar prescriptions which would lay the basis for nationhood and escape from a state without grace. The idiom of Bengali nationalist consciousness derived from the Hindu cultural inheritance. It also emphasised the

Hindu identity. Nabagopal's *Hindu Mela,* 'fairs' intended to project as well as develop patriotic effort across a wide front, expressed this sense of identity in a very pointed fashion.

The self-conscious definitions of nationhood, however, went beyond the limits of Hindu society in the 1870s. Rajnarayan Basu's vision of a pan-Hindu association was supplemented by hopes of close co-operation with 'our Muslim brothers.' The Indian Association was intended to rouse the political consciousness of the 'Indian people.' The Indian National Congress embodied similar aspirations. The nationalist literature, however, long excluded the Indo-Islamic past from its perception of national heritage. The identification of Turko-Afghan and Mughal dynasties as alien rulers and their regime as 'Muslim rule,' projected in British historical writings on India, was accepted by the Bengali Hindu writers with rare exceptions. The Rajput and Maratha resistance to the Delhi-based empires was incorporated into a new mythology of Hindu patriotism. No doubt, this literary misinterpretation of the pre-colonial past implied a quest for surrogates to the unlikely struggle for liberation from a rule which was undeniably alien. Yet 'Muslim tyranny' became an essential part of nationalist historical perceptions. The fact partly explains the failure of nationalism to draw in the educated Bengali Muslims. The often positive assessment of the British rule was sustained by favourable comparisons with the alleged 'Muslim tyranny.'

However, the chauvinistic cultural self-assertion with bizarre trappings, highly popular among a section of the Hindu bhadralok, had for its negative referrent not Muslim tyranny but the 'denationalising' western influence. The term 'Hindu revivalism' has been applied somewhat loosely to a wide range of social cultural phenomena at least some of which do not merit that description. Arguably, the three thinkers discussed in these lectures were not Hindu revivalists in any meaningful sense of the term. My reasons for this statement are discussed below. The discovery of Western scientific knowledge in ancient sanskrit texts, and the explanation of Hindu superstitions in terms of electro-magnetic theories were surely not their cup of tea. But like many other Indians of their time, they did share with the Hindu chauvinists the psychological need to assert the superiority

of the inherited tradition in relation to Western culture. The assertion might be for the benefit of one's own countrymen or that of the ruling race. If the former, it might be an irritated response to the reformers' criticism of indigenous society or an attempt to boost the weakened morale of the vast majority who had not lost faith in the received wisdom nor renounced the prescriptions of ritually correct conduct. The self-assertion aimed at the Westerner was often a direct response to ill-informed criticisms or ethnocentric attitudes expressed without the inhibitions which circumscribe similarly inspired statements today. The faith in the absolute and relative excellence of one's inherited culture was at times genuine, especially when it focussed selectively on features like the family system preferred to Western counterparts in terms of one's values. As often, it was a compensation for one's sense of inadequacy in relation to the master race. An ill-paid Bengali journalist or school-teacher could sustain his belief in Indian moral and spiritual superiority only as a *tour de force*. The widely different conscious or unconscious motives which informed cultural self-assertion often co-existed in the same individual. This particular manifestation of nationalist sentiment invariably coloured all perceptions of the West.

The intellectual quest for nationhood tried, not altogether successfully, to reach out beyond the limits of middle-class consciousness. The misery of the agrarian masses which produced dramatic confrontations like the indigo riots was a self-evident fact. Most thinkers realised that the future Indian nation could not exclude the unspeakably poor majority of the population. Many perceived the elite-mass dichotomy built into the Indian social order as a damned inheritance. The benefits bestowed on the native collaborator by the colonial regime, especially those of Western education so prized by the Bengali bhadralok, were seen to lead to a widening of the gulf, in fact to a severance of all communication between the elite and the masses. Since all assessments of the West had as their starting point an evaluation of the colonial regime, the latter's contribution to mass misery and the growing alienation of the elite feature prominently in such exercises. Aggression leading to conquest and spoliation of other people's lands was a typically Western crime

in the eyes of many publicists. The criminality of the act was evident from the empirically verifiable fact of mass misery.

Nationalism and its multiple expressions were, however, not the only determinants of Bengali perceptions of the West. The miniscule minority of the population educated at the Hindu College in the 1820s were trend setters in the country's intellectual history in more than one sense. Their passionate enthusiasm for Western literature and social thought was inherited in varying degrees by their intellectual descendants. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of people who shared that enthusiasm for Western literature was sizeable in absolute terms. The proliferation of periodicals which dealt *inter alia* with Western literary and cultural themes expressed and at the same time helped develop that sustained interest. They brought some knowledge of the West even to those whose familiarity with English was limited. The selectivity in interest persisted. Western science did excite curiosity, but it was perforce a closed book to the majority of the educated, owing to inadequate facilities for scientific education. Literature, especially English romantic poetry and fiction, dominated Bengali intellectual concerns. The successful adoption of Western literary forms heightened this interest. The serious quest for an acceptable social ideology induced explorations of contemporary Western thought. The intellectual elite read deeply into Western philosophy covering the entire range from Plato to the Socialists. But two systems of thought—Utilitarianism and Comte's Positivism—appear to have had the greatest appeal, the first as the ideology of nineteenth century progress and the second for its prescription of progress with order and regard for the sacerdotal caste. And of course European history was studied eagerly for it was expected to reveal the secret of Western dominance and the greatness of the world's great nations. Moreover, the new religion of nationalism drew its inspiration from the struggles for liberation in Italy and Ireland. India's own history, as written by Western scholars, was also a source of patriotic inspiration, even though Western scholarship on the subject was rarely considered free from ethnocentric and imperialistic prejudice. There was one more Western theme studied in depth—Christianity. It

attracted but also repelled. For it was the faith of the arrogant Anglo-Indian and the bigoted missionary.

I have tried to identify these major trends in the social and cultural life of Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century which defined the boundaries of elite interest in Western civilization. Within the limits thus set, the specifities of perception derived from the life-experience and intellectual vision of the individuals concerned. As noted above, even within a narrow social world, the possibilities of variation in personality and outlook were considerable. The cult of the individual was a characteristic trait of nineteenth century Bengali culture. It drew sustenance from the lives and achievements of some very remarkable men and women, three of whom are the subject matter of these lectures.

III

Our three protagonists came from virtually the same social background, were exposed to the same educational system and, in fact, they all had at least a part of their education at the same institution of higher learning,—the Hindu College, renamed Presidency College by the time of Bankim and Vivekananda. Yet it is difficult to think of three individuals more different from one another.

All three took great pride in their Hindu identity, but Hinduism meant something very different to each of them. Bhudev, the son of an orthodox family of Brahmin pandits and brought up in an atmosphere of strictly correct ritual conduct, cherished the inherited practices and beliefs. Deeply attached to his parents and grandparents and happy in his relationship with the wife married to him in her childhood, he accepted *in toto* the *sastric* code as embodied in the life of the brahminical extended family. No wonder he saw no difference between the defence of traditional practices and the patriotic defence of national sovereignty.

Bankim, according to his own statement, received little parental guidance in his childhood and fell into 'evil ways.' Until 1880, his religious attitude was marked by a scepticism which verged on atheism, and he never accepted the codes of

ritual conduct. After 1880, his unexplained conversion to theism and the ancestral faith was expressed in a highly individual and idiosyncratic system of belief. It did invoke the Gita and the Mahabharata, but arguably Bankim drew at least as much upon Utilitarianism, Positivism and the German Doctrine of Culture as on ancient Hindu sources. He focussed on only one of the many messages in the Gita—*nishkama karma*—action without attachment. His inspiration appears to have been more patriotic than religious. All his fictional protagonists who practice the doctrine do so in service to the country, not in pursuit of salvation.

Swami Vivekananda, the scion of a liberal father, eclectic in his religious outlook, grew up in an atmosphere of pietist devotion one commonly associates with popular Hinduism in Bengal. For a typical product of the new enlightenment, he developed an unusual aspiration—a direct experience of the Deity. It induced his discipleship of Ramakrishna and a life of *sanyasa*. His guru taught him that all faiths were ways to God. But he rejected orthodox practice in all stages of his life. He preached Vedanta abroad, especially the doctrine of non-duality. He hoped for a millenium of universal religion, with the West kneeling before the wisdom of India. At home, arguably, religion was not central to his patriotic preaching though he did expect his cult of strength and service to draw inspiration from Vedantic faith. He was a mystic seeking to achieve patriotic goals in his public life.

All three invoked Hindu cultural idioms in their patriotic propaganda. The same is true of Gandhi, and earlier, of revolutionaries like Brahmabandhav and Aurobindo. If the latter cannot be described as Hindu revivalists, nor can our three protagonists. All three distanced themselves from the antics of Sasadhar Tarkachudamani and his associates. Bhudev and Vivekananda had deep regard for Islam and the Indo-Islamic past. The Indian nation of their dreams included the Muslims very emphatically. Muslims to Bhudev were 'foster-brothers.' The future India, to Vivekananda, was the rightful inheritance of the masses, oppressed by the Brahminical social order for millenia. Bankim alone rejected the Indo-Islamic heritage. His aversion for 'Muslim rule' derived from the misreading of history

which he shared with many of his contemporaries. It was a patriotic rejection which has acquired communal overtones in the context of later developments. But for this, Bankim's evocation of Hinduism as a source of national regeneration was more symbolic and nominal than substantive. It was an exercise in cultural self-assertion and began with a quest for points where 'Bengalis'—not Hindus—could score over the West. It is well to remember that even in his awareness, the said Bengalis included two communities, Hindus and Muslims. Each in his very different way, our three protagonists were self-consciously Hindu and proud to be so. The Hindu identity was the cultural referrent of their patriotism and world-view. They were not concerned with the revival of obscurantist beliefs and practices as a part of cultural self-assertion. Bhudev defended orthodoxy as an inherited way of life threatened by a mindless and denationalising acceptance of Western values. He was willing to make important exceptions in the national cause and described untouchability as a sin for which God had punished Indians. It is difficult to reconcile all this with Hindu revivalism.

This question is relevant to our present discussion for one reason only. All assessments of the West in the nineteenth century were concerned with comparisons with the Indian, especially Hindu, heritage. One's perception of that heritage and its relevance to contemporary life was hence a determining influence on one's perception of European civilization. The chauvinistic claims to Hindu foreknowledge of all western science—the characteristic trait of Bengali Hindu 'revivalism'—were obviously not in the same street as pleas for selective apprenticeship under Western guidance or a universalist faith, based on Hindu wisdom, but aimed first at the peoples of Europe and America as its most worthy recipients. Lumping crass stupidity together with seriously considered judgement as a single historical category is not a sign of academic good sense.

Evaluation of British rule in India and the phenomenon of colonial rule generally was often the starting point of enquiries into the life and culture of Europe. Nationalism was of course the motivating factor. Our three protagonists were all intensely patriotic, but they related very differently to the evolving ideology of nationalism. Each had his distinctive programme for

national regeneration. Like their other contemporaries, they accepted British rule as something one had to live with. There are reasons to doubt the sincerity of their protestations as to the benefits of the Raj. The visceral responses were surely not one of gratitude. Bhudev preached a programme of 'self-defence'—a defence that is of the commanding heights of national life against alien encroachment. Education, commerce, industry and the received tradition were the areas most in need of defence. The Brahmin scholar who had interpreted that tradition for millenia was to be helped to maintain his life of unsullied purity and scholarship so that he could continue his role of interpreter and innovator in terms of the changing national need. Bankim, an admirer of Rani Lakshmibai and a man moved to tears by the memory of Plassey, arguably protested too much in his statements of gratitude to British rule. His visions of armed struggle in the defence of national interest also subsumed a programme of regeneration centred on the individual. He preached a doctrine of action without expectation of results and balanced culture of all the faculties. The object was to keep one's body and mind ready for service to the nation 'like a sharpened weapon'. The mystic Vivekananda could be made to lose his Vedantic calmness of spirit by references to British rule in India. He despaired of physical victory over the mighty children of Virochana. By one account, however, he was more than sympathetic to the burgeoning revolutionary activities in which his disciple, Nivedita, later played a leading role. The India of his vision however was uniquely different from all contemporary ideals. He perceived for the educated and the privileged only one role—to educate the downtrodden masses and make them aware of their power. The poor would then claim their inheritance.

Any assessment of a culture other than one's own is necessarily influenced by one's experience of direct encounter with its protagonists. Bhudev and Bankim met Europeans mainly as senior colleagues in the bureaucracy. Such colleagues were, in effect, bosses and the fact that they were often much younger in age was resented by both the writers. Despite his fair share of humiliation, Bhudev formed some enduring friendships with his European colleagues. Bankim too had friends in high places.

including a Lieutenant-Governor and his lady. But his experiences of bitter conflict far outweighed those of friendly encounters in his relationship with British civil servants. His great pride bordering on vanity was perhaps a factor. Whatever the reasons, he did consider his career as a middle-ranking bureaucrat 'the curse of his life'. Vivekananda, growing up in the climate of increasingly militant nationalism, had an almost xenophobic resentment against western civilization, the British in particular. His long sojourn in the west and enthusiastic reception in America and Europe, especially by the elite, altered his attitude to one of profound admiration. It co-existed with his great pride in the Indian past.

To conclude, the three thinkers discussed in these lectures were upper caste Bengali Hindus and members of the new colonial 'middle class'. Their cultural inheritance was a combination of western education and the Indian tradition as manifest in Bengali life. But the three related very differently to the emerging nationalist ideology, their Hindu identity and the British presence. Hence the basic differences in their perceptions of the west.

IV

At the centre of all assessments of the West, one encounters a fundamental anxiety: are the Europeans, the English in particular, a superior race? Bankim's answer to this query is unequivocal: 'In culture, education, power wealth and happiness, —in fact, in all respects, the English are superior to the Bengalis.' 'That the generality of Englishmen are superior to the generality of Bengalis' would be denied only by 'persons blinded by vanity'. 'Hitherto, the world had never seen material progress comparable to that of modern Europe and earlier generations of mankind had never hoped for such progress.' This recognition of superiority bred, in Bankim's opinion, an attitude best described in his own words:

> We are particularly curious to learn what we would dislike in Europe... We are Bengalis, reckoned a very insignificant people compared to the great nations like the English. Compared to the English, we are not praiseworthy in any way.... We do not know for certain, if this is true. But

> we hear this said every day and are beginning to believe in its truth. This belief does us no good. It reduces our love for our country, our respect for our own people. ...If we do not see any particular quality in which Bengalis are superior to other people and Bengal superior to other countries, then we lose all feelings of patriotism. We hence long to hear if we are superior in any way to the most civilized nations. But nowhere do we hear such things. What we do hear are not the words of truthful and judicious men. What we hear are only the words of people brought up in the narrow traditions of our society and given to false vanity. We cannot believe those words ; they do not fulfill our desire.

Much of Bankim's writings is a conscious effort to rescue his fellow countrymen from this characteristic predicament of a subject people. The two other writers I shall discuss also shared the same concern, but perhaps somewhat less self-consciously.

Bankim identified a crucial difference between European and Indian attitudes to knowledge and action. He saw in this difference the chief clue to Europe's progress and India's decline. 'Europeans say, "Nature can be conquered" and this belief inspired, scientific enquiry leading to a better life for men on earth. The Indians viewed nature as unconquerable, the source of all misery. Hence the only way to end misery was the severance of all contact with nature.' 'The central maxim of the western civilisation is that "knowledge is power"... The central maxim of the Hindu civilization is that "knowledge is salvation"...' Europe's pursuit of power was the source of her progress. The Hindu indifference to power explained their decline, their defeat in this life while the outcome of their extra-terrestrial quest remained uncertain. The faith in renunciation was at the root of Indian inactivity and the major cause of their political dependence. A similar rejection of material pleasures explained, in Bankim's opinion, the alleged eclipse of civilization in Europe during the middle ages. The evil was fortunately counteracted by the revival of classical learning and 'civilization progressed as a result'.

Compared to the West, Indians were not necessarily lacking in prowess as their martial record from the days of Alexander to 1857 showed quite conclusively. India's long record of alien

rulers and alien rule was not the result of weakness but of a political culture essentially different from that of Europe. As a people, Indians had never been defeated, for unconcerned with national identity or interest they had never fought as a people: the conquerors merely vanquished Indian dynasts. By contrast, in modern Europe as much as in ancient Greece the desire for independence was strong; the Hindus were the least worried about the ethnic origins of their rulers. Their object was a peaceful existence, a matter of cultural preference, not national weakness.

This difference in attitude was manifest in the different approaches to history. The Europeans, proud of their past and their present, considered all their actions achievements: 'even if we yawn, the fact should be acclaimed as imperishable glory for ever and ever and hence duly recorded.' They had therefore a surfeit of historical writings—a source of national pride and inspiration. Indians, in their humility, had none. This was indeed a misfortune.

While the transcendence of self and parochial boundaries, implicit in one's love for one's country was a force for good, patriotism was not necessarily desirable. 'European Patriotism (sic)' Bankim wrote, 'was a terribly monstrous sin.' Essentially, it was a plea for the plunder of other societies and urge to enrich one's country at the expense of all else. It looked upon the welfare of other nations as a source of danger to one's own. It explained the continual conflicts among the nations of Europe and the extermination of native populations in their colonies. If the fulfilment of man's destiny, the ultimate good, lay in the limitless expansion of man's capacity for love, European nationalism was a barrier to that progress. Their parochial nationalism drew upon two chief sources of European culture, the Graeco-Roman civilization and the martial ardour of the modern Europeans' barbarian ancestors. The Christian glorification of love was paid only a lip service. Even there, the Judaic element in Christianity reinforced their aggressive patriotism. Thus 'the Europeans love all mankind only in words; at heart and in their actions, they only love their own country.'

Bankim perceived in contemporary Europe a conscious effort to transcend this limitation. Utilitarianism, despite its

arithmetical simplicity and its unacceptable identification of all virtue with itself, was seen to be 'righteous' (*dharma*), as was Comte's positivism and the Christian doctrine of the brotherhood of man. In his essay on "Equality" (*Samya*), which he later rejected as erroneous, he included Rousseau's egalitarian philosophy as well as the 'fruits born of that seed'—communism and the International—in the same category of beneficial philosophies. His belief that inequality was morally unjust and socially disruptive survived his rejection of his own youthful enthusiasms. He praised Europe for her better treatment of women and popular education, despite the persistence of serious inequalities. He saw in the Indian tradition of restricting knowledge to a small elite group a major reason for her decline.

His constant harping on the multiple imperfections of Indian society did not, however, reduce his sensitiveness to Europe's shortcomings. He criticised the narrowness of the English intellect, manifest in its failure to understand anything about India and Indians despite 150 years of contact. As he put it, 'It is not possible that I should describe a pond as the ocean because I am a mere puddle.' To him the Bengali mentality was even narrower, but this was partly the result of western education. He found the English intolerant and cited Mill's experiences as an unbeliever as examples of social injustice born of intolerance. In his "Maitre Tiger Longtail" he parodied European hypocrisy: 'The civilised do not abuse anyone very explicitly. But with due circumspection you can indulge in worse abuse.' In his well-known rejoinder to a speech by the young Rabindranath he lampooned the English abhorrence of the 'lie direct' and their moral acceptance of hypocrisy, 'the pretence of truth', the lie which filled one's heart. His great admiration for the civilization of modern Europe was counter-balanced by one final judgement: 'I should describe even nineteenth century Europe as an immature stage in social evolution.'

The quest for points in which the Indian inheritance scored over the European led, in his estimation to two positive discoveries:

> One does not feel like describing the European works as books compared to the books in Sanskrit, at least in size. Compared to the Ramayana or Mahabharata, a European

> epic is like a terrier as compared to an elephant, the willow or cyprus as compared to a banyan tree or a mountain stream dear to Greek poets compared to the Ganges, Godavari or the Indus.

Clearly, he had more than size in mind. Yet in his literary judgement he unhesitatingly acknowledged the greater profundity of Othello as compared to *Uttararamacharita*. Despite qualifying statements, he was evidently more moved by Shakespeare's portrayal of Miranda and Desdemona than by Kalidasa's Sakuntala.

His faith in the superiority of Hinduism over all other religions was subject to no such qualification. The Christian ideal, embodied in the life of Christ, was incomplete beside the personality of Krishna, "the true Hindu ideal" for in the latter every positive quality vouchsafed to man had reached its apogee. Krishna combined in himself the qualities of a householder, politician, law-giver, saint and preacher. Not so the Christ whose kingdom was not of this world. But the modern Hindu had abandoned the path of action central to Krishna's teaching ; so had Europe deviated from the Christian gospel of love and peace. The ancient ideals had ceased to have much practical relevance.

Yet the superiority of the Hindu ideal was not in doubt. The doctrine of devotion (*Bhakti*) while explicit in Christianity, reached the final stage in its evolution in Hinduism, for the Hindu perceived the Deity in everything and not as a being outside the Universe. The Hindu concept of dharma was deeper and wider than the western notion of religion. The Hindu way of life with its spiritual discipline embedded in day to day existence was incomprehensible even to the western protagonists of the System of Culture. Western science, 'the ogress stinking of blood and flesh, adorned with cannon, cannon-ball, gunpowder, breach-load and the like,' was only beginning to catch up with the cruder aspects of the truth underlying Samkhya philosophy and the Hindu concept of Trinity. Above all, the Christian God, who condemned men to eternal damnation for petty sins, especially for the sin of not being christian even if the unfortunates were born before the advent of Christ 'was totally unfit for that holy name', '...No fiend in human shape could be such

an unjust...tyrant.' Bankim's vindication of the superiority of Hinduism may sound unsubtle in summary, but his is a closely argued case and its logic compares well with the contemporary metaphysical or theological writings in its rigour.

His severest criticism of western culture was reserved for Indological scholarship, especially studies of Hinduism : 'I have reached the conclusion that in the literary world there can be no greater sin than to read the translations, commentaries and criticism of the Vedas, Smriti, Darsana, Puranas...etc.' by European scholars. Such scholars 'found it intolerable that the dependant and weak Hindus were ever civilized and that their civilization was very ancient.' He castigated Weber in a language which lacked his usual restraint : 'India's ancient glory is intolerable to this descendant of barbarians who roamed the forests of Germany only the other day.' For he saw in Weber's *History of Sanskrit Literature* nothing but a desire to diminish India's glory. Ethnocentricity, deliberate falsification, racial bias and often sheer ignorance were, in his view, the most prominent characteristics of western Indology. Max Mueller himself was not spared : the parallelism between his perceptions of India and the scholarly tiger's comments on mankind was made quite explicit. The European vilification of India did not stop with the past. It subsumed the present as well, especially in its persistent assassination of the Bengali character :

> In the opinion of some seers endowed with copper-coloured beard, just as the creator collected particles of beauty from all that was beautiful in the three worlds to create Tillottama, so he collected particles of animal nature to create this unprecedented phenomenon, the modern Bengali character.

Bankim did not entirely disagree with this negative assessment : 'The ocean of animal nature was churned and thence emerged the Babu, like the moon, to light up the entire landscape of India.'

The bitter irony, repeated again and again in his skit on the Babu, his hymn to the English and the famous encounters between the Babu and Lord Hanuman, was only an exaggerated statement of a seriously held view. The castigation focussed on the degeneration induced by alien rule. He was all for intelli-

gent imitation of the west, for it was only natural that the backward nations should learn through imitation of the more advanced. Thus had modern Europe emerged through the barbarians learning from classical Europe. The great English themselves imitated the French in matters of food and dress. Things went wrong when imitation was carried to undesirable limits destroying possibilities of innovation and improvement. This happened especially when the imitator copied vices rather than virtues: 'The Bengalis are not so good in imitating virtues; in imitating vices they have no pears in the world.' The western impact was unsatisfactory because the knowledge of the west remained superficial. The Bengali carried this knowledge on his back the way bullocks carried sacks of sugar with no access to their actual content. The wealthy Babu collected western *objets d'art* and the impedimenta of an elegant life-style without taste or understanding. The achievements of Western art were viewed with ignorant incomprehension. By contrast, the ways of the English in food, dress and drinking were eagerly copied, monkey-fashion as the divine monkey noted with interest in *Hanuman-babu-samvad*. Western education had shaken the Hindu's faith in his own religion but not replaced it with any worthwhile ideal. It had taught him a contempt for his own language, creating an impassable barrier between the elite and the masses. 'We do not hate the English or their language', Bankim emphasized. He acknowledged that western education was the chief benefit derived from the contact with Britain, the English language the common meeting ground for all Indians. Yet he deplored the emergence of a class of people unable to speak their own language and refused to believe that education would filter down to the unpriviledged like water filtering through the earth's surface to the lower strata.

The total lack of sympathy between the priviledged and the deprived he attributed partly to this new barrier of language and education: '...if the uneducated do not understand the language of the learned, how will their mutual contact produce any result?' He saw no future for a society so divided in interests and concerns. The English-speaking Babu the 'imitation Englishman', was his object of ultimate contempt. The Babu's central object in life was summed up in the 'Hymn to the English':

> Whatever I do, is for your pleasure, I donate [money] so that you will find me generous ; I do good to others so that you will call me a philanthropist ; I cultivate learning, so that you will call me learned. Therefore Oh Englishman please look upon me with favour.

Bankim's vitriolic definition of the Babu encapsulates his views on the negative content of the western impact : 'They indeed are Babus whose tongues have been sanctified by licking the aliens' spittle.'

His barbs were however meant only for what he saw as the perversion of western influence. 'The English', he categorically stated, 'were great benefactors of India. The English are teaching the Aryans new ideas.' Off all the 'priceless jewels' garnered from the 'treasury of the English soul' the most precious were two, erstwhile unknown to the Hindus—love of independence and national glory. The dynamism of modern Indian society derived, in Bankim's opinion, from western education. Her stability, however, depended on the ancient dharma. The ideal course depended on a balance between the two.

Bankim's assessment of British rule in India was marked by the same concern for balanced judgement. He drew a definitional distinction between misrule, alien rule and subjection to foreigners. Only the third category implied the rule of one nation over another. By this criterion, British India was a dependent nation, Mughal India was not. In the latter case, only the ruler was of alien origin. British India experienced misrule in so far as there was racial discrimination and 'sometimes the welfare of India was sacrificed for the welfare of Britain'. Besides, under the British the elite in India did not have access to positions of power and authority commensurate with their 'intelligence, education, family and status'. Indians were thus prevented from learning to run their own affairs. These negative facts had to be balanced against the very positive benefits of western education which, Bankim believed, would have been inaccessible but for the rule of a European nation. He also emphasized the infrastructural developments, the growth of modern transport and communication—the high level of peace and security, import of new articles which made for gracious living as much as the new attitudes and concerns derived from

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western education. He discounted theories of drainage of resources and general impoverishment. His criticism was more fundamental—that all that the British had achieved in India had benefitted only the 'rajas, landlords, traders and money-lenders' but not the peasantry, not 'in the very least.' Until this overwhelming majority of India's population benefitted from Britain's rule, Bankim refused to sing its glory. This unqualified castigation was, however, placed in the context of Indian history: 'While modern India has racial domination, ancient India had caste domination. Nothing had changed for the vast majority.' True, in the past the oppressor and the oppressed had the same skin colour. 'It is unlikely,' Bankim commented, 'that oppression at the hands of one's own countrymen is rather sweet and oppression by foreigners somewhat more bitter.' The seer in his maturity rejected his *Samya* as erroneous but the spirit that had inspired that essay persisted in his later writings. The substantive statement relating to the miserable conditions of the peasantry was also not rejected.

His final judgement on the British contact can be reduced to two basic statements. First, loyalty to this alien rule, despite its limitation, was desirable, because this would contribute to national cohesion. That loyalty even implied avoidance of conflict with the Anglo-Indians, however execrable they might be. If, however, the object of loyalty was not the glory of Britain, but national progress, racial animosity was a desirable attitude. For Indians must compete with and be the equal of Europeans. Competition came easier with enemies than with friends. The time for friendship must await the achievement of equality.

V

The complexity of responses one finds in Bankimchandra was equally present in the writings of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay. He is generally regarded as a conservative Hindu opposed to many of the social reforms advocated by his forward-looking compatriots. His essays on the Hindu family system are indeed a reasoned argument in favour of the joint family, early marriage and much else that the 'reformed Hindus' found unacceptable at least in theory. Even these essays, however, are not informed by

any spirit of bigotry and contain very little of forced rationalisation. They reflect a system of values, assessed and sustained rationally. His detailed comments on western civilization, its history, achievements, attitudes and implications for India, especially in its manifestation as the British colonial rule, are similarly inspired by the same values which he considered superior to those informing Europe's life and culture. This judgement was not based on any simplistic belief in India's spiritual superiority or the immorality of the westerner, but a detailed analysis following a very original line of thought.

Bhudev ascribed the origins of culture and national characteristics to a dynamic interaction between religious ideology, historical trends and evolving systems of values. Religion, above all, imposed common characteristics on otherwise divergent peoples. As Christians, all Europeans shared a set of attitudes and codes.

> They deny predetermination and hence are neither peaceable nor contented. Their societies are like so many battlefields for the constituent communities. They have emerged as powerful nations through mutual contacts and assimilation, but that too more through external pressure than through genuine mutual sympathies. Every European nation had to fight continually with others around them and their internal conflicts were thus gradually resolved to a large extent and solidarities established. The martial way of life demands strong group solidarity and this in turn generates the seeds of several norms like obedience to the leader, allegiance to one's group etc.

The Christian conception of the life hereafter was perceived by Bhudev as a factor contributory to the aggressiveness of European culture. 'They do not accept that one's life hereafter is inevitably determined by one's deeds, good and evil, in this life,' but believe instead in the Divine grace or wrath, itself concerned more with the individuals' doctrinal faith and less with virtuous or sinful action. He saw this imputation of deliberate discrimination as an ascription of injustice to God. 'Men conceive of God in the light of the highest good they feel in their own hearts. If the European heart contained any notion of true justice, they would not have conceived of such an unjust God.' The belief that the inequities and inequalities of life on earth were determined by the will of God might have deep and sub-

tle meaning for the wise and the virtuous, but for the common man, ignorant of subtleties, it could breed only aggressive self-indulgence :

> In fact, among the common people in Europe, the instinct for self-indulgence is indeed very strong ; no other society in the world contains such destructive, turbulent, reckless and egotistical people. Even in their own countries they are continually involved in quarrels, strifes, riots, murders and the killing of their own wives and children ; their behaviour towards the non-European races is replete with deception and cruelty ; one feels that their innermost soul is suffused with joy by acts of oppression and ravage inflicted on others.

This judgement, taken with others discussed below, was not xenophobic in spirit, but part of an exercise at assessing the characteristic strength and weaknesses of the west. The perceived aggressiveness of the westerner was sought to be explained in terms of historical development :

> If one observes how the common European disports himself, one realises the truth of the statement that many of their ancestors were pirates who fearlessly crossed the seas to ravage the provinces of the Roman empire. Having destroyed the Roman empire they adopted its legal-administrative system and picked up the religious beliefs and practices in vogue there. As Christianity did not accept the belief in the inevitable consequences of one's action, it failed to restrain their criminal propensities. The other reasons for this failure were partly their inherent turbulence and partly the defects of the Roman legal-administrative system adopted by them. Under the later Romans, this system highly glorified wealth and individual rights. The ancestors of the modern Europeans adopted it and learnt to glorify wealth to an unwonted degree. The common man in Europe has developed the nature one expects to find among people unrestrained or little restrained by ethical norms and inspired by the love of gold... They have no hesitation in killing people or using force ; their lust for gold as the means to satisfy their material desires is infinite. Their scriptures require them to convert all men on earth to their faith, but they wonder all over the surface of the globe only in the quest of wealth. The piracy of the ancestors has been merely camouflaged nowadays by commercial pursuits. Pursuit of pleasure and violent aggression are the essential elements in the European personality.

The potentialities of conflict within Europe, to Bhudev's understanding, were contained by the acceptance of an international order based on the principle of balance of power, modified by a newly emerging tendency, viz. the attempts to consolidate peoples of the same race, manifest in the unification of Germany and the Russian efforts to control the Slavic peoples. Besides, the European international order was strictly limited in scope. It excluded the European efforts to establish unequal trade throughout the world. If trade was a fair exchange of goods between consenting parties to mutual advantage, 'the trade with Europe was no such simple affair. Europe says, "Whether you want it or not, you will have to buy my goods and I shall take from you what I want. If you do not agree to this, let us fight it out". Europe says, "You are the king of another land and hence uncivilized".' Hence the claims to extra-territoriality. 'Further, our missionaries will speak ill of your religion and social practices and convert your people.' The true source of international conflict lay in such appeal to force. The industrial revolution had aggravated the need for expansion. The machine, Bhudev quaintly argued, had created massive unemployment and hence armies of migrants attacking other lands.

Commenting on the nature and origins of the British empire he wrote,

> They go out to colonise or for trade. Wherever they colonise they totally uproot the aboriginal population. Where they trade, they consider nothing but their own gain. If any thickly populated country comes under their control, they do not directly persecute its religion nor hinder its ancient customs. But they keep in their own hands all administrative and political power ...The English do not usually consider in their action what is good or just and have no understanding of what is desirable or undesirable for others. But they may somewhat modify their ways when they encounter true ability; and institutions they consider to have been beneficial for themselves, they try to introduce to some extent for others in the belief that it will be good for them as well. The Englishman may be selfish and incapable of sympathy, but he is of heroic stature. He honours those who are strong.

The English were inherently selfish, Bhudev concluded, but

recognized a quality of innocene, born of narcissistic infatuation in that selfishness :

> ...all their emotions are submerged in that concern for self-interest. Whatever is to their interest, they consider consistent with their sense of what is right at all times. He fails to understand how his happiness can fail to be the source of happiness to the entire world.

He based this statement on his personal knowledge of the English and argued that its truth would be manifest to anyone who had dealings with them. '...the Englishman is very fond of you so long as he is the recipient of any help or advantage ; and as soon as he thinks that the flow of advantage has stopped, he can no longer remember the help he has received.' Bhudev illustrated this self-regarding incapacity to see the other person's point of view from recent history. In his opinion, the English truly believed that the Afghans loved them dearly despite all that they had done to them and their long record of conflict. They had a similar assessment of Burmese attitudes : 'As soon as the king Thibaw lost his throne, the joy of the Burmese knew no bounds. Those among the Burmese who do not want us are rebels, bandits and dacoits.' Such simple faith derived not from hypocrisy, but from a deep infatuation with one's self-interest. The French had conquered Algeria and the Russians Turkmenistan without claiming, Bhudev pointed out, that the conquered were eagerly waiting to be conquered and gratified by the act of conquest. Evidently, he had not heard of *la mission civilisatrice*. In his view however, there was one redeeming feature in this blind selfishness : 'To a large extent, the English do not differentiate between their own interest and the interest of their nation.' They 'were always intent on the pursuit of national interest, vociferous in the praise of their countrymen, and aggressively annoyed at any criticism of their people.' Their progress, he opined, was due to their patriotism, not their selfishness. The latter might well prove to be the cause of their decline.

Bhudev believed that the Asian societies shared a set of values which were essentially different from those of Europe. 'In Asia ethical norms dominate. In Europe there is an excessive pursuit of material pleasures. In Asia, especially India, the tradition is one of forbearance ; in Europe, both tradition and

usage are geared to the pursuit of self-interest.' Countries like China and Japan, he felt, would catch up with Europe in material achievement, but the path followed would be essentially different. A social consensus based on the universal acceptance of certain ethical norms, and not the struggle for self-assertion on part of the different elements in society, was the clue to the social dynamics in Asia. 'Much of the conflict in Europe was for the attainment of the elementary truth that the king exists for the benefit of the subjects and not the other way; in China, this awareness, being a part of their religious belief, is deeply rooted in the tradition.'

A remarkable feature of this analysis is that it derived from a clearly articulated theory of cultural relativism: societies followed different paths of development and these could not be measured by any common yardstick. 'Such comparisons would be possible if all societies followed the identical path of development and then alone one could say which society was advanced and which backward.' The Greek and Roman civilizations, from which modern Europe derived the major elements in their culture, had virtually deified their respective societies, and considered sacrificing oneself for one's society or state the highest good. They did not distinguish between the received traditions of their societies and what was morally right. 'They knew that for the good of one's society every action was permissible; in other words there was nothing wrong in doing harm to other people (for the sake of one's own).' Such values were, however, modified in the case of modern Europe by the adoption of a religion which originated outside their own society and culture. One's own society thus ceased to be the *summum bonum* and Christian values provided an independent criterion for the assessment of inherited and established practices. The faith of the classical civilization in the unrestricted power of the state over its individual members was replaced by a more restricted view of the role of the state and a new faith in the sanctity of individual rights. Thus though the modern Europeans were no less cruel in their treatment of people belonging to other cultures, moral values and a liberal spirit had a greater hold on their minds.

Bhudev did however depart from his cultural relativism in

his attempt to set up universally acceptable criterion for the evaluation of human progress. The ethical sense in man, he postulated, evolved gradually and its source everywhere was love. He argued, like Bankim, that human consciousness progressed gradually from self love through love for one's family and community to love for one's nation and then on to the love for all mankind. In this scale of things, western patriotism stood on a relatively inferior rung with the Hindu ideal of universal love encompassing the inanimate world as well representing the highest level of development. To repeat, Bhudev's language and style of argument suggests an unconscious ethnocentricity, rather than self-conscious chauvinism.

The ethnocentricism is most evident in his evaluation of western Christianity, almost a mirror image of the Christian missionary appraisals of Hinduism, even though inspired by a more tolerant spirit. If the development of a civilization could be judged by its ideals, he argued, then the limitations of the European Christian life were manifest in their highest ideals, the lives of Jesus and Mary which offered no models for the man in society living the life of a householder—echoes of Bankim. 'The Europeans have no ideal of purity in their lives because the life story of Jesus is so incomplete (from the point of view of the householder). They are thus the prey of sinful instincts like greed.' This inadequacy was seen to be matched by a quality of enterprise, inspired by the ideal of excellence in the standards of consumption. In these terms, he judged the civilization of Europe to be unbalanced and decadent :

> The real advancement of a society is not achieved by the invention of machinery or technology nor through the self-advertisement of one's own glory. The extent to which a society has high ideals and is inspired by love, devotion and intensity of effort for the attainment of that ideal is the measure by which it may be judged civilized, virtuous and progressive.

The inadequacy of Europe's ideals was also ascribed to the peculiarities of her historical development—the fact that the modern European nations got their religion from people they had defeated. The supremacy of religion was hence never accepted and the custodians of the faith were always subject to the autho-

rity of the state. In the conflict between the church and the state the state was victorious most of the time. Hence the excessive increase in state power and the emergence of a belief in the divine right of kings. This in its turn led to the growth of countervailing powers in society, of the aristocracy and the commonalty, and prolonged conflicts to control royal authority. The unhistorical doctrine of social contract was formulated in this view as a theoretical basis for restrictions on royal authority. In this analysis, contractual obligations were perceived as central to the European social norms ; the real reason for this may lie in their excessive egotism or the preponderance of mercantile ways in their life : 'One consequence of the imaginary social contract was the growth of another false belief, namely, that the ordinary man as much as the exceptional individual had the right as well as the ability to offer opinions on the most serious matters of state.' Bhudev saw the roots of revolutionary tendencies in western societies,—and he included in that category socialism, anarchism, nihilism as well as the lynch laws of America—in this empirically unsound doctrine on which modern democracies were based.

He castigated the tendency towards territorial aggrandisement as the worst feature of the western political life—a tendency he ascribed to the weak hold of religion and ethics on European life and the unlimited desire for material pleasures. Unless Europeans abandoned their proneness to oppress the weak, there was no prospect of any rule of moral law there 'and indeed it would be logical to conclude that their children would also be born as inheritors of the same criminal propensities.' The highest achievements of Europe were perceived to be the result of a very different set of moral values. He saw the beginnings of England's greatness under the Puritans when 'materialism, the pursuit of material advancement and individualism were relatively weak among the English.' He saw England's reluctance to be involved in any conflict in just causes, e.g. the resistance to Prussian aggression against Denmark or the struggle for Italian unification, as a consequence of her growing wealth and love of pleasure and a corresponding decline in moral and religious values. This decline was seen to be stronger among the upper classes and England's surviving strength ascribed to the persist-

and implied no value judgement as to any desirable trend. Besides, it was misleading to suppose that the evolution of human society was in any way similar to the evolution of the species. The latter view merely reflected the Europeans' self-assessment as the ultimate product of human evolution. Such assessments depended very much on the yardstick one adopted. By Bhudev's yardstick, the evolution of European society was for the most part an object lesson in what mankind should avoid. His summing up of what the Indians should learn from the English is a pithy statement of his views of the west : 'All that the Hindus can learn from the English is their efficiency in matters practical and nothing else.' 'Again I say, if through the contact between these two societies the English and not the Hindu character underwent a change, that would be for the best.'

Yet by a strange paradox, he found the fact of British rule in India entirely desirable despite its many limitations. He rejected the view of European thinkers that foreign domination was undesirable under all circumstances. In his judgement the British empire in India was the fulfilment of a destiny towards which the country was moving through many centuries. He discounted the British claim that they had conquered India through superior might. It was more a case of Indians willingly moving towards a political fulfilment they themselves desired. The much-vaunted *pax Britannica* was also a result of this willing acquiescence and the Hindu love of peace rather than that of the conqueror's strength.

The awe and wonder of the empire was nevertheless very real for him. 'Never before had so few inhabitants of a country so small acquired such a vast empire so far away.' That a company of English merchants had achieved this feat was an even more wonderful fact. 'England's occupation of India was however only one evidence of her greatness' for her empire covered a sixth of the world's land surface as compared to the twentieth that Rome had succeeded in acquiring. Besides, unlike the empires of Rome or Russia, Britain was at the head of a multi-centred empire based on trade. The problems she had to tackle were infinitely more complex. For India the trader's extreme caution which was a feature of British policy had proved to be a boon. Unlike the arrogant Portuguese and

Spaniards, openly contemptuous of the natives, the British had acted with great circumspection in India. Their respect for the rights of the princely families, non-interference in local religions and customary practices and the continuation of the personal laws of the Hindus and Muslims had rendered the English the legitimate objects of India's 'gratitude, respect and devotion.' 'England has brought India to her destined path; the English have treated their subjects judiciously and with due circumspection; what the English have achieved in India, no one else has achieved before and no one else could have achieved.'

The encomium was however by no means unqualified. The root of the problem was seen to lie in the divergent political traditions of the two countries. In India the king and his subjects were alike subject to the universally accepted rule of the righteous law, dharma; its principles were universally understood and deviations from it subject to customary sanctions which included the dethronement of the unjust king. Such a consensus precluded the possibility of conflict for political power among the different elements in society. This idealised picture was contrasted with the western tradition wherein royal power was restricted by the countervailing and clearly defined power of the subjects. In a situation where the subjects had acquired no such power the English saw no limits to their authority. Only their far-sighted caution introduced an element of legitimacy and righteousness in their conduct of affairs in India. Yet the basic contradiction was not resolved. In the Indian tradition the king was the servant of his subjects, the taxes were wages paid for his services. The English claimed revenue as the master of the land and the proprietor was no longer sure of his ownership. Taxes were collected for services long regarded as the duties expected of the king. Recourse to justice had become a matter of great expense under the new dispensation. In the context of Indian traditions, the image of the new ruler was that of a lawless exploiter.

This was despite the very considerable achievements of British rule in India—unification, the ruthless suppression of illegality, high level of peace and security, expansion of trade, freedom of the press, expansion of western education and the like—the Raj was superior to most other colonial regimes. The

Muslim, Spanish and Portuguese empires had tried to undermine the established religions of the subject people. The Dutch imposed a monopoly on a wide range of agricultural products in the East Indies and imposed forced labour on the population. The Russians blatantly exploited Central Asia for the benefit of their officials and merchants while the French in Algeria had sought to erase out the national culture of the local population. The English could not be accused fairly of any such direct assault on the national identity or interests in India.

Yet in the last analysis the Raj was a failure for it had failed to win the affection of the Indian people. The English tried to explain away this fact by blaming the conservatism of Indian society—the system of purdah which inhibited social contact—and the differences in custom and language. Bhudev discounted this explanation for, he pointed out, the Indians had deep affection for their Muslim rulers despite such factors. The innate complacency of the English character, accentuated by the tradition of political acquiescence in India, had developed into endless vanity and vainglory. As a result every perceived failure was attributed to some deficiency in the subject race : 'That the Indians do not much care for us is really the fault of the Indians—this is the firm conviction of the English.' So long as such attitudes persisted, all their efforts were likely to be concentrated on the acquisition of ever greater power and not on any effort to please the ruled.

The root of this attitude was to be found in their great love for their own country and a corresponding disdain for all others. 'The English', Bhudev explained, 'was not a hater of foreign countries, but only of foreigners.' If they can conquer a land and rule it the way they rule their own land without any resistance from any source, they find foreign parts quite acceptable. In all their colonies they had eliminated the original population, introduced English law, language and institutions and kept aloof from the subject races. They avoid racial admixture with foreigners, especially those of non-European origin. In this respect they are significantly different from the Latin races. The latter's willingness to intermingle with the non-Europeans did not however render their rule more humane, for the English had no record of cruelty comparable to those of the Spaniards or the

Portuguese. Yet the other European races tempered their hatred of non-Europeans with some concession of humanity to the latter. Not so the English, firmly convinced of their uniqueness and superiority. His attitude to the rest of mankind was summed up in one unanswerable declaration of superiority ; '..."you can never be my equal. For I am English and you are not".'

In a final balance sheet of the pros and cons of the British rule in India, Bhudev found that all the positive features inspired by a sense of justice and fair play were tarnished by a lack of sympathy for the subject people. The declared principle of government that India would be ruled for the benefit of the Indians was observed so long it was consistent with the welfare of England. The equality before the eyes of law had been modified in practice to treat the white man as a privileged person. The rule of law was vitiated by an imported complexity incomprehensible to the masses. All executive power was concentrated in British hands. Tariffs were tilted in favour of English imports. The only road to reform or redress was through increasing the power of the English in India. The rule of the English sojourner in India, very different from that of the Muslim migrants who accepted India as their homeland, deprived the ruled of the benefits of sympathy. Hence 'in truth, it is only the period of English rule that can be described as the age of foreign domination in India.'

The negative consequences of the western domination were analysed by him along the lines familiarised by the 19th century publicists like Naoroji and others. The familiar theme of deindustrialisation, heavy taxation, wastefulness of state investment, drainage of resources all appear in Bhudev's singularly unemotional indictment of British rule in India. His truly original contribution to this debate referred to an unintended consequence of the imperial presence,—the denationalising and negative dimensions of western education in India. The investment of excessive effort in acquiring education through a foreign language created a class of people unable to take an unbiased view of its limitations and separated from the vast majority by the language of their intellectual discourse. Uncritical admiration for the language generated an Anglolatry involving the acceptance of western yardsticks without question. Even the

patriotic Indian declared the excellence of Hinduism on the ground that contrary to missionary propaganda, the old religion was not inconsistent with English values. Individualism, which in practice meant unqualified selfishness, was preferred to the values of the joint family. Much of the western education in India was no more than learning by rote or at best an uncritical acceptance of some untested theories. The system was virtually untouched by any scientific attitude, the true glory of modern European culture. Hence it was that the western education, contemptuous of Hindu superstition, eagerly took up the new fads for the occult and waited hopefully in their drawing rooms for the materialisation of *mahatmas* from Tibet.

British rule, for all its limitations, Bhudev concluded, was there to stay. Moreover, of all possible foreign dominations, it was the best. His advice to his countrymen was to avoid the non-Indian practice of political agitation, to maintain a respectful distance from the ruler, to try and protect national interest through positive action especially in matters concerning education and the economy and to wait for the emergence of the leader. This leader, he predicted, would be truly Indian in his character and outlook, conversant with what was best in Europe but untarnished by the individualistic greed of the west and the slavish imitativeness of the western educated. Written in 1893, —this was not an inaccurate description of a man born in 1867 in the town of Rajkot in Gujarat.

VI

In comparing India's civilization with that of Europe, both Bhudev and Bankim had emphasized their belief in the greater profundity of our spiritual traditions. Vivekananda carried this comparison further to emphasize the centrality of spiritual concerns in the life of the Indian people. By contrast, for the westerner religion was a peripheral matter, something to be taken in one's stride along with the multiple paraphernalia of civilized existence. Pursuit of current fashions, like acquiring Japanese vases, was not less important than the weekly visit to the local church—Christianity was inadequately understood and what was understood was not followed. The masses had a dim notion of

their religious beliefs, the more educated and privileged were not much better off in this regard. Discoveries of science had raised profound doubts regarding the doctrines of the Christian faith. Such doubts were aggravated by the Church's long record of persecution of uninhibited enquiry into the mysteries of nature. The ideals of forgiveness, love and other worldliness had ceased to be a vital force. So had the belief in the innate sinful nature of man and the humility that went with it. Instead, the Western man, the English in particular, felt a towering self-confidence. The active religious-spiritual principle informing their lives came closer to the Hindu ideal of dharma, the active and manly pursuit of worldly goals within the limits of a moral law. Salvation or *moksha* had ceased to be a goal. The Christian ideals of peace and renunciation had a far greater reality in Indian life. There, even the unlettered peasant had an instinctive awareness of the ultimate Vedantic Truth, the fundamental unity of the created universe and the Brahman who permeated that universe. Despite all the material achievements of Europe, India was superior to the west in her spirituality, the actual realisation of the Vedantic goal by many individuals in all walks of life. Material achievements, however impressive, were of limited importance as was evidenced by past history. For the great conquering nations of the earth had perished, while the meek Hindu, steadfast in his spiritual culture, had survived numberless calamities. Her superiority in matters spiritual rendered her superior in the most fundamental sense.

Even in the contemporary context, the achievements of science guaranteed no fitness to survive. They had not even solved the problem of poverty, for satisfaction of needs depended ultimately on a restraint on one's cravings. The wealth created by the new technology was of little benefit to the masses :

> In matters material, oppression has reached an extreme level. All wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of the few ; they do not do any work themselves, but have the power to make millions of men and women do it for them. Through such power, they can unleash a blood-bath on this world. Religion and all else lie at their feet. They are the true rulers, repositories of all power. The western world is ruled by a handful of Shylocks.

The much-vaunted democratic system with its orderly government, liberties and elected Parliaments was a sham. Decisions were firmly in the hands of the powerful; the rest merely follow perforce like the Gadarene swine. Like Bhudev, he too felt that the whole of Europe was sitting atop a volcano of their own creation. Without a spiritual revolution, her civilisation would be blown to pieces in less than 50 years.

The prospect for survival lay in a new concern with matters of the spirit among some of the best minds of Europe. Their faith in Christianity shaken by scientific discoveries and the inadequacies of the priestly tradition, they were on the look out for a new source of spiritual solace. Vedanta, with its universalist outlook, rational foundations and proximity to the new scientific understanding of the material world as a mass of undifferentiated matter had evoked interest, for it alone offered an acceptable bridge across the chasm separating scientific enquiry from spiritual quest.

In this context, Vivekananda conceived of India's special role as perceptor to all mankind despite her weak, dependent, fallen state. Drawing upon her surviving resources of spiritual strength, she would undertake the task of regenerating mankind by living and spreading the gospel of Vedanta. The regeneration, of course, was to begin at home through a restoration of manly prowess undermined through centuries of priestly superstition and inhuman treatment of the underprivileged in Indian society. His prescription for the purpose was significantly different from Bankim's. He saw no advantage in imitating westerners, for such efforts were sure to prove futile. To his understanding, Europe's strength derived from her self-confidence and social cohesion. It was a combination of the two, especially the latter, which enabled 40 million Britishers to rule over 300 million Indians. The constant denigration of India by foreigners and natives alike, 'the endless stream of futile abuse' had undermined the people's morale. A self-abnegating dedication to the regeneration of mankind, inspired by Vedantic self-knowledge, would prepare India for her world mission, the creation of a universalist faith encompassing Europe and a material world in which the country's downtrodden could live with dignity.

This new role for India he saw as no more than a revival

of an ancient tradition. Accepting the contemporary belief in the common ethnic origins of the Indo-Aryan peoples, he projected a hypothesis inspired by a poetic vision. The Greeks reacting to the Aegean world of exquisite natural beauty turned their vision outwards, to understand and investigate the wondrous world around them. Their Hindu brothers saw instead the majestic snow peaks of the Himalayas, sombre forests and great rivers, symbols of an infinite reality which induced an inwardness of thought. The civilization which originated from Greece excelled in its knowledge and mastery of the external world. The Hindu alone realised the Atman, than which there is no higher goal in man's evolution. Every time the conquering hosts from the west impinged on India's quiet, self absorbed culture, the latter's spiritual influence spread abroad—through the Hellenistic kingdoms and the imperial provinces of Rome. Christianity itself was little more than an incongruous mixture of bits and pieces culled from the Hindu tradition. The civilization of England, a distant progeny of the Hellenes, had now united a large part of the globe's surface through military power and a new technology of transport. The ancient routes created by Europe's aggressive ambition had been reopened. Good would again come out of evil. The Vedantic gospel would rejuvenate the world using the channels of modern transport and communication.

But what about the instrument which had rendered this new mission viable? Vivekananda's assessment of Britain's role in India was indeed ambivalent, but his ambivalence had an unusual angle to it. He did not thank the British in particular for the benefits of modern technology. The benefit he emphasized was of a different order—the destruction of the monopoly of privileges which the upper castes, especially Brahmins, enjoyed. In the next sentence he expressed his gratitude to the Muslim rulers for the same achievement, adding that 'the Muslim occupation of India liberated the poor and the downtrodden', for a fifth of the population accepted Islam. 'It is madness to imagine that this was achieved only by fire and sword.' The ambivalence becomes explicit when he refers to his unparallelled hatred of the British until he got to know them during his sojourn in England. In a speech in Pasadena in

January 1900 he spoke of the enslavement of 300 million Indians, their monthly average income of 2 shillings per head, the chronic state of starvation of the vast majority and the massive toll in human lives taken by famines every so often. In 1893, he prophesied that Europe would suffer for her iniquities through the wrath of God. The Chinese, he said, would appear as this scourge. He added :

> Of all the peoples who had come to India the worst were these English. Consider the history of India, the exquisite temples left by the Hindus, the beautiful palaces of the Muslims. And the English ? Mounds of broken brandy bottles and nothing else... When our people die of famines, they put their feet on our necks and drink up the last drop of our blood and export crores of our money to their country.

Yet, he pointed out, God had shown Indians no mercy, for they had been unbelievably cruel to their own people. His anger against alien rule included the western educated reformers. Hundred years of reform had not affected the masses in the very least, for the reforms had relevance only for the upper castes. Unintelligent denigration of popular beliefs only alienated them. To such imitative reformers, sycophants of alien rulers, he had one simple advice, 'Shut your mouths and open your hearts'. In direct physical confrontation with these masters of the material world, sons of the super-demon Virochana, Indra's challenger, he saw no chance of success. Like most of his contemporaries, he evidently believed in the illusion of permanence created by the Raj. His aim therefore was the religious-cultural conquest of the west. The latter's regard for the new spiritual guru might, Swamiji hoped, establish a semblance of equality and hence some fruitful understanding.

* * * *

Bankim and Vivekananda, and, to a lesser extent, Bhudev were major influences on the development of modern Bengali culture. Bhudev was the first to formulate the ideal of 'legitimate nationalism'. The legitimacy referred to what was permissible under colonial rule. The other two inspired aspirations which transgressed the bounds of 'legitimacy'. All three contributed powerfully to the stock of intellectual ideas,—the positive

content of nationalist ideology which informed social and political action. Their perceptions of the west were in some ways central to their *weltanschauung*. They both reflected and helped shape more widespread notions on the subject, some of which—like a west/east dichotomy equated with materialism and spirituality respectively—became accepted stereotypes. They were pacesetters of a tradition of purposive exploration of western culture which developed into an important trait of Bengali intellectual life.

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THREE VIEWS OF EUROPE FROM NINETEENTH CENTURY BENGAL

Tapan Raychaudhuri

(S. G. Deuskar Lectures on Indian History, 1981)

The Bengali intelligentsia's response to the alien west was rich and variegated. These lectures examine the complex character of that response through the writings of three major thinkers of the nineteenth century—Bankim, Bhudeb and Vivekananda. The author argues that though each of the thinkers approached the west, its culture and its political domination over India, in his own unique fashion, the west was one of their abiding concerns. Their writings thus form a major cultural heritage of Bengal. Dr. Raychaudhuri is currently at St. Antony's College, Oxford, U.K.

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